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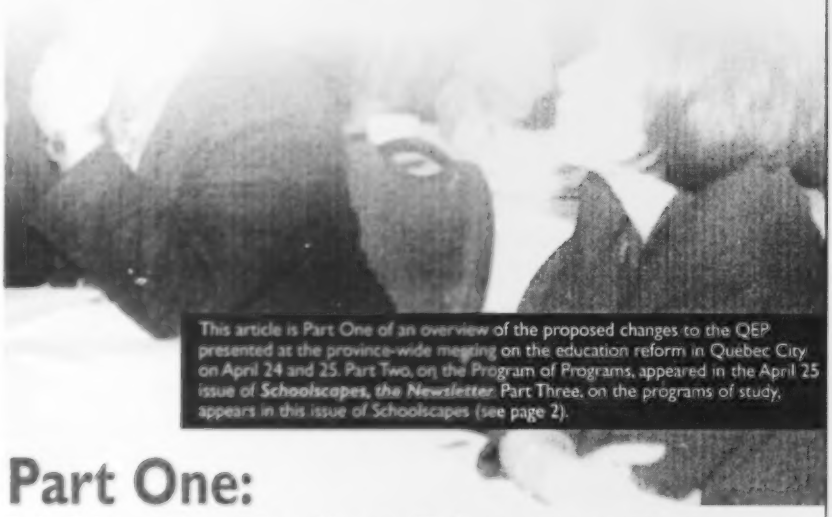
Schoolscapes
The Newsletter

The Québec Education Program:
Where We Are Now



This article is Part One of an overview of the proposed changes to the QEP presented at the province-wide meeting on the education reform in Québec City on April 24 and 25. Part Two, on the Program of Programs, appeared in the April 25 issue of ***Schoolscapes, the Newsletter***. Part Three, on the programs of study, appears in this issue of Schoolscapes (see page 2).

Part One:
Making the Québec Education Program Clearer and More Concise

By Claudine St-Germain

Since the implementation of the Québec Education Program in Elementary Cycle One, educators throughout Québec have been reflecting on how to improve it, how to make it clearer and easier to use while building on the work that has already been accomplished.

Margaret Rioux-Dolan, director, and Huguette Drouin, assistant director, of the Direction de la formation generale des jeunes, explained why changes are being made to the Québec Education Program for the elementary and secondary levels and what the changes are intended to achieve.

The main objective is to ensure that the structure of the QEP favours the integration of cross-curricular learnings with subject-specific learnings and knowledge. "We wanted to emphasize the cohesiveness of the QEP," explained Margaret Rioux-Dolan.

To attain this objective, measures are being taken to:

- make the QEP clearer, and make it easier to locate information in it
- clearly indicate the links between the Program of Programs and the programs of study
- present the cross-curricular competencies as the backdrop for the subject-specific competencies
- make greater use of the areas of lifelong learning as contexts for questioning, applying and transferring learning (and not just as themes on which to base activities)
- emphasize the essential learnings, the importance of knowledge, high standards, the cultural dimension and the quality of the language of instruction

There are two main reasons for these changes. First, the Ministère wanted to make the Québec Education Program clearer, in response to a need expressed by the Commission des programmes d'études, teachers in the pilot schools and society in general. The idea was also to make the Québec Education Program more user-friendly in order to encourage teachers to employ it regularly as a guide in their planning, teaching and evaluation. "We want teachers to integrate the QEP into their pedagogical practices," stated Rioux-Dolan.

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For A Comprehensive Vision of Student Services

By Claudine St-Germain and Eve Krakow

Student services play a vital role in students' overall development. In order to better integrate them into the school's educational services, in to spirit of the education reform, new orientations and new practices need to be adopted.

"Student services are a continuation of and complement to teaching services," began Margaret Rioux-Dolan, director of the Direction de la formation générale des jeunes. "All members of the school team are called on to offer these services. This will most likely require not only new practices, but also places for these different professionals to meet and dialogue. Collaboration and the establishment of partnerships are necessary to respond to the characteristics of today's student, who has increasingly diversified, acute and precocious needs."

Rioux-Dolan also presented the legislative changes that have been made with regard to student services in light of the education reform. These changes aim to decentralize certain powers toward the schools. Thus, the school becomes responsible for setting up the student services and approving the activities offered within its walls. The governing board makes certain choices according to the margin for manoeuvre given to it by the *Education Act*. Finally, under the Basic School Regulations, the school board must establish four programs of student services. These four programs are:

- learning support services designed to provide students with conditions that are conducive to learning
- student life services designed to contribute to the development of students' autonomy and sense of responsibility, to their spiritual and moral dimension, to their interpersonal and community relationships, and to their feeling of belonging to the school and society
- counselling services designed to help students, throughout their studies, with their academic and career choices and with any difficulties they encounter
- promotion and prevention services designed to provide students with an environment conducive to the development of a healthy lifestyle and of skills that are beneficial to their health and well-being.

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The key words for the 2001 version of the QEP are thus clarity, conciseness, precision and rigour.

Easier to Use

It is important to understand that these modifications are adjustments; they do not change the basic orientations of the QEP. Rather, they are designed to improve its organization and presentation, to meet the Ministère's goal of greater clarity.

As regards the content of the QEP, the Ministère proposes to:

- reduce the number of competencies and formulate them more simply
- retain only prescriptive elements (to avoid the risk of confusion with optional elements)
- organize subject content in terms of integrating concepts (strategies, knowledge, techniques, etc.)
- indicate more clearly the level of competency expected at the end of each cycle
- include in the section "Expectations Related to the Competency" information on the student profile expected at the end of each cycle
- replace the specific learnings in Cycle One in the Social Sciences and in Science and Technology (defining a prerequisite competency in each subject area, placing each prerequisite competency in its respective subject area, and taking the prerequisite competencies into account in the programs of study)
- revise and explain the diagrams

In order to make the QEP more agreeable and easier to use, the MEQ will also:

- simplify the language used
- eliminate repetitions, overlaps and wordiness
- indicate references to, and links with, the Program of Programs
- propose a solution to replace the columns of Xs referring to the cycles (which tended to be confusing)
- use separate pagination for each section
- have the layout redone by graphic designers
- reduce the number of pages
- use landscape layout
- continue to use 8 1/2" X 11" looseleaf sheets in a ring binder
- do a final reading to ensure that all parts of the document are consistent

The 2001 version of the Québec Education Program should be available throughout the school system in August. In the meantime, educators can continue to use the present version without any problem, because the changes will have little effect on the content of the program and none whatsoever on its basic premises.

The Québec Education Program:

Where We Are Now

Part Three: Programs of Study

By Pascale Sauvé

Accent on the Essentials

While the spirit and content of the programs of study remain unchanged, they will nevertheless undergo some adjustment. Huguette Drouin, assistant director of the Direction de la formation générale des jeunes, outlined the principal modifications made to the organizational framework common to all programs.

The programs of study will have a new structure. Each one will begin with an introduction that describes the program's characteristics, states how the cultural dimension will be integrated into the program and lists the program competencies. Then, there will be a statement of each competency, followed by a text on the expectations related to the competency (explanation of the competency; links between the program of study and the cross-curricular competencies; the teaching, learning and evaluation context; and the progress of the student within the cycle), the elements of the competency—in the form of a bulleted list—the evaluation criteria and the end-of-cycle expectations.

Organizational Framework

- **Introduction**
- **Competency no.**
- **Expectations related to the competency**
  - Explanation
  - Links between the competency and the cross-curricular competencies
  - Teaching, learning and evaluation context
  - Progress of the student
- **Elements of the competency**
- **Evaluation criteria**
- **End-of-cycle expectations**

- **Essential learnings**
- **Cultural references**
- **Information and Communications Technologies (ICT)**

Another important adjustment is that the characteristics of the competency will be reworked and incorporated into the Québec Education Program in another form. "Some people regret this decision. This feature was widely appreciated," admitted Drouin. "It was good, but it was optional and very analytical. The old formulation gave the impression that all the characteristics had to be present before a student could be said to have developed the competency." Drouin added that a certain number of these characteristics will be incorporated into the texts on the competencies and, if necessary, the rest may be transferred to the supporting document that will accompany the Program.

In addition, the essential learnings—formerly called the subject content—will be grouped around integrating concepts: knowledge, strategies, techniques and others, as needed. "We have tried to bring the learnings closer together so that people do not have to read too many pages before realizing that there are, in fact, learnings somewhere," Drouin pointed out. For some subjects, the essential learnings and knowledge will be placed immediately after the competency. For others, they will be put at the end.

As part of the cultural dimension, cultural references will be suggested. These are examples to which teachers can refer to bring alive the cultural dimension of each subject.

The sections on information and communication technologies (ICT) will be kept. "We consider that learning about and using ICT is prescriptive. While it may strain the logic of the reform, we cannot make the methods selected prescriptive because they are related to a specific learning situation or a classroom activity," explained Drouin. Still, some suggestions for familiarizing students with ICT will be retained. "They should not be interpreted as being prescriptive," she advised. However, the suggestions for student projects and enrichment activities will no longer appear in the Québec Education Program.

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She also described some of the practices that schools will have to adopt when organizing student services, in order to reflect the main elements of the reform, the Québec Education Program and the Policy on Special Education. Student service practices should:

- be based on student needs
- follow a competency-based approach to learning and development (both subject-specific and cross-curricular competencies)
- foster close links between the services and teaching activities, in particular through common exploration of the areas of lifelong learning
- respect students' autonomy and the choices they make
- foster a preventive approach by working with teachers
- allow for rapid and early intervention
- foster as natural as possible an adaptation of services, intervention and integration into the community (particularly for students at risk or with learning or behavioural difficulties)
- adopt a perspective of progressive learning
- take a guidance-oriented approach
- give parents a larger role
- provide schools with a greater margin for manoeuvre (so they can take into account the realities specific to their situation)
- encourage evaluation of services

"These practices call for concerted action, and should enable schools to adapt all the services to the characteristics and needs of the students," said Rioux-Dolan.

A Reference Framework for Renewing Student Services

By Claudine St-Germain and Eve Kralow

In order to align student services with the new realities of education, the Direction de l'adaptation scolaire et des services complémentaires is currently developing a reference framework, to be made available in winter 2002.

Denise Gosselin, assistant director of the Direction de l'adaptation scolaire et des services complémentaires, provided an overview of this reference document. "The goal of the reference framework is to help school boards and schools design and organize student service programs, so as to bring them in line with the changes brought about by the education reform," she explained. "This document proposes to renew student service practices, notably by linking these services more closely to the student's educational program."

Four main orientations will guide the development of the reference framework. First, student services must be situated within the school mission. "The concept of educational success is larger than that of academic success," said Gosselin. "The Program of Programs gives renewed meaning to many of the activities that these services have organized in the past. These activities give students the opportunity to develop competencies and to transfer them to other contexts. The approach advocated will therefore be more educational than correctional, fostering the development of competencies and focusing on the student's autonomy."

Building links between the school and the educational community as a whole must also be a priority. "The extent and diversity of student needs requires a broader range of support. It has become essential to establish a partnership with parents and the surrounding community if we are to meet young people's needs," stated Gosselin.

It is also important to maintain a global, integrated vision of these services. "Setting up a comprehensive and systemic approach to young people's needs strengthens the protection factors, particularly against school failure, and reduces the risk factors by ensuring the best possible environment," said Gosselin. "The integration of services requires a greater presence of professional and support staff in the school, in order to ensure the continuity and complementarity of actions taken with the students."

The fourth major orientation is to focus on the facilitating conditions to ensure quality services. "This orientation brings out the importance of creating trusting relationships with the students, and of offering them significant role models that convey basic values such as the respect of differences, equity, etc." Gosselin also insisted on the importance of adapting the services to student needs as these needs evolve, and of adjusting practices in light of new knowledge.

The reference framework will describe the four programs of student services specified in the *Education Act*, outlining their nature, purpose, objectives, characteristics and links to the cross-curricular competencies and areas of lifelong learning. More specifically, the document will describe each of the 12 student services that schools are required to set up to achieve the objectives of the four programs. They are as follows:

- services designed to promote student participation in school life;
- services designed to educate students about their rights and responsibilities;
- sports, cultural and social activities;
- support services for the use of the documentary resources of the school library;
- academic and career counselling and information;
- psychological services;
- psychoeducational services;
- special education services;
- remedial education services;
- speech therapy services;
- health and social services;
- spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service.

The reference framework will also deal with the organizational impact of the changes made to student services. For example, it becomes imperative that the responsibility for the student's development be shared. "Beyond each person's responsibilities, there must be real collaboration among the different levels in the school, as well as with the school board and the community," said Gosselin. The reference document will also suggest a procedure for organizing the services and integrating the various changes proposed, as well as guidelines for facilitating this transition.

"The proposed changes are significant, and all those involved will have to take time to familiarize themselves with these changes and to see how they can improve their practices," Gosselin concluded.

A broad consultation on the reference framework for student services will take place in fall 2001. The final version of the framework is scheduled to be published in winter 2002.

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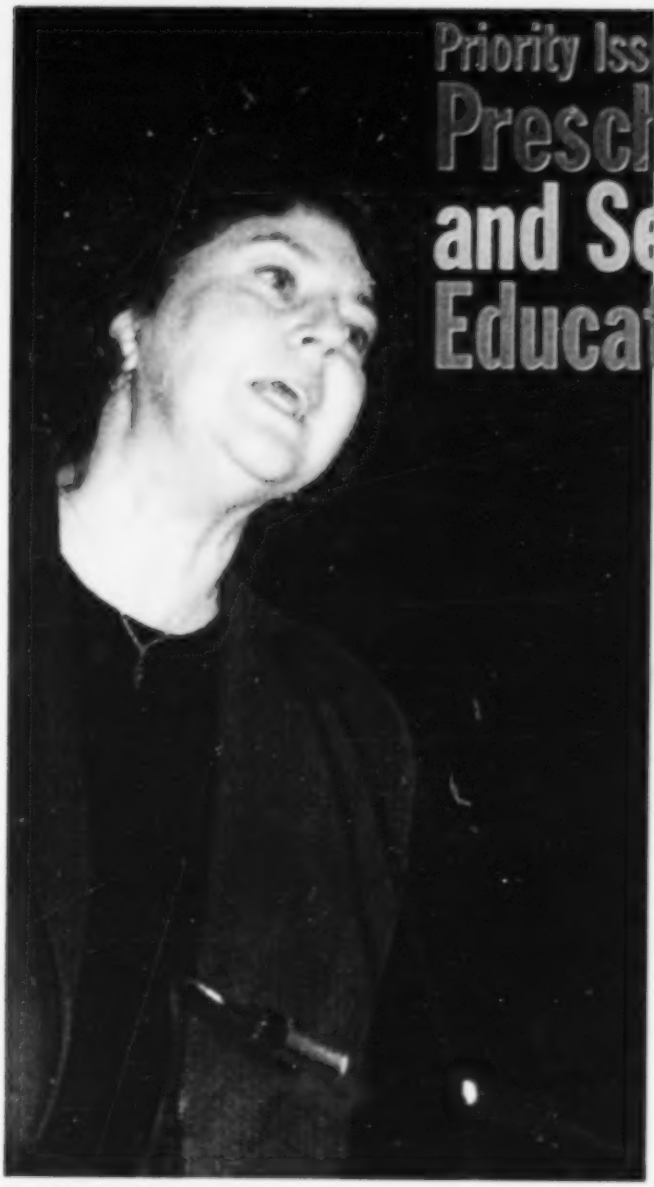

Priority Issues in the Preschool, Elementary and Secondary Education Sector

To provide an update of key issues in the preschool, elementary and secondary education sector, directors from five different departments each gave a brief presentation on work in progress. The speakers were Sylive Turcotte, Direction de la formation et de la titularisation du personnel scolaire; Roger Vézina, Direction des ressources didactiques; Alain Mercier, Direction de la formation générale des adultes; Marguerite Rioux-Dolan for Marie-France Benes, Direction des services aux communautés culturelle et École montréalaise; and Denise Gosselin, Direction de l'adaptation scolaire.

By Eve Kraiker

Of Governing Boards, Math and Teacher Training

Sylive Turcotte, director of the Direction de la formation et de la titularisation du personnel scolaire, spoke of three current projects in her department: surveys on the functioning of governing boards, professional development for elementary school teachers in math and science, and a the new orientations in teacher training.

Governing Boards

Several studies are currently under way to determine how well the governing boards—now in their third year of existence—are functioning. "The governing boards had many important decisions to make this year, notably in terms of pedagogical organization. So we felt it was important to see what difficulties they may have run into," explained Turcotte.

A first study, now drawing to its close, is being conducted jointly with the Fédération des syndicats des enseignants du Québec and the Fédération des comités de parents. "This investigation, touching about one thousand schools, will enable us to find out and understand how the governing boards operate."

At the same time, a second study is being carried out in collaboration with the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières. "This is a more qualitative study on governing board partnerships. About one hundred people, sitting on governing boards in a dozen schools in the Mauricie–Centre-du-Québec region, were interviewed about how decisions are made within the governing boards."

The results of both studies should be ready in November.

Professional Development in Mathematics

In December 1999, Turcotte recalled, at a meeting of about 200 people concerned with the situation of mathematics and science, there was a consensus on the urgent need for subject-content training, particularly for elementary school teachers and for students in elementary school teacher training programs.

"In light of these observations, at the start of January, we sent out an offer of training to the schools. This training was to focus on the acquisition of subject content, and was therefore rather demanding."

After the first two days of training, the Direction asked participants to evaluate the session. The results of the evaluation led them to suspend the training program, for several reasons:

- Participants had difficulty making clear links between the subject notions, as presented in the training sessions, and the content of the Québec Education Program.
- The training focused primarily on math. However, as elementary school teachers, the participants will also require training in other fields: languages, social sciences, etc. "They asked us to have a broader vision of professional development in terms of the subject content covered. We have therefore decided to review all our professional development programs to come up with something that will be more comprehensive."
- Because the training had not been planned at the start of the school year, some school boards and schools could not guarantee that the people who attended the training session would be able to continue the year after.

"So we will have to get back to you on the issue of subject-specific training," said Turcotte. "However, I should mention that everyone we met with—some one hundred people—agreed that there is a need to work with elementary school teachers on subject content in the different subject areas so that teachers are comfortable applying it in the context of the Québec Education Program."

Initial Teacher Training

A document outlining the new orientations in initial teacher training is about to be sent out to the schools

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and universities: *La formation à l'enseignement : les orientations, les compétences professionnelles.* [1]

The document was initially presented at the November Rencontre nationale, after which it underwent a vast consultation process. "We work with a provincial consultation table that includes all the unions, associations, French- and English-language school boards and other groups," Turcotte explained. "In addition, several regional offices carried out consultations with their school boards or various regional groups."

The two main orientations are the professionalization of teaching and a greater emphasis on culture. "During the consultation, there was a very wide consensus that these two orientations are entirely pertinent to teacher training."

The final document contains twelve competencies grouped into four categories: base competencies, competencies related to the act of teaching, competencies related to the social and school context, and competencies related to teachers' professional identity.

One of the basic competencies deals with the mastery of various forms of knowledge and culture, Turcotte noted. "A concern that emerged very strongly during the consultation was that this greater emphasis on culture was not sufficiently acknowledged in the competencies, and also, that the whole question of the mastery of various forms of knowledge by future teachers was not explicit enough in the document."

In the preface to the document, Turcotte said, the Minister of Education, François Legault, invites the Comité d'agrément des programmes de formation en enseignement (CAPFE)—the committee makes recommendations to the Minister regarding the accreditation of teacher training programs—to make sure the programs it recommends respect these orientations and develop the specified competencies. "He asks the CAPFE to pay particular attention to the means set up within the programs to ensure the mastery of the language of instruction, and of the second language, for students in this field."

The document also insists that each university set up a body to ensure dialogue and collaboration between the education faculty and subject faculties, as well as between the education faculties and schools and school boards. "It will therefore be important for you to participate in the development of the teacher training programs according to the mechanisms established by the universities," Turcotte told the audience.

New Textbooks and ICTs

Roger Vézina, of the Direction des ressources didactiques, provided an update on the availability of textbooks for the new curriculum and on the integration of information and communication technologies.

"The key question on this issue of textbooks is, will there be any? So I'll give you a brief overview of the situation."

At the moment, he said, one material for French-language instruction has been approved. Two more in French and two in mathematics are currently being evaluated, and a decision should be rendered by the end of the school year. The list of approved instructional materials can be consulted on the department's Web site: http://www.meq.gouv.qc.ca/drd.

"We also checked with the various publishers and distributors to see what is coming up and when," said Vézina. "At the start of or during the next school year, we should have seven materials in French, seven in math, one in music and two in moral and religious education."

It is too early to say what materials will be available or adapted for use in English. This will depend largely on the demand expressed by English-language school boards, according to Michel Lafontaine, director of the Learning Materials Centre, the new organization responsible for providing materials and resources in the English-language sector. Lafontaine noted, however, that the centre is currently working with teams of teachers to develop materials for History, Geography and Citizenship Education, and that projects to develop materials in several other subject areas should be under way by next fall.

Is there enough money?

If we had to change all the textbooks in Cycle One for all students at the same time, would some schools and school boards run into financial difficulties?

"The answer is yes. We have made some estimates and we know that we're missing several million dollars", said Vézina However, he noted that in the budget speech, Pauline Marois announced a reserve for education, stating: "This amount may be used to upgrade and modernize technological resources and buildings. It may also be used to facilitate the transition respecting educational reform, in particular through the purchase of textbooks and through better support for teachers."

Vézina said that the Minister of Education also has some money in reserve, should major difficulties arise. "So we're not worried. But as to the when and the how, that is for the Minister to announce." He added that this issue is likely to be raised at the National Assembly during the upcoming discussions on supplies.

ICTs

The five-year plan on new technologies, begun in 1996-97, will end in June this year, as well as the budgetary measure on the purchase of computer equipment.

"We are currently working on a new measure for next year, which the MEQ will present to the Conseil du trésor. We should receive an answer in August, considering that it will be part of the three-year investment plan."

However, he noted that this is only a transitional measure, because he has received the mandate to act on the Conseil supérieur's recommendation: to establish a policy on the integration of technology. This policy would apply to all levels of education, from preschool to university, including both general education and the vocational and technical sector.

The policy should be ready in about a year, if one includes the consultation period. "Only then will we be able to develop action plans," said Vézina.

Wide-band telecommunications

There has also been considerable pressure from school boards to have the MEQ invest in wide-band networks. A study is currently in progress.

"An outside engineering firm has been hired to determine the costs of connecting all schools in Quebec, including adult education and vocational education centres. The firm will also recommend which kind of technology would be most appropriate.

The study is to be completed in June. "We should then be able to formulate some hypotheses and make proposals to the Minister of Education, so that we can act on this issue starting next year."

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[1] Currently being translated into English. Please note that any terms used here are provisional, for the purposes of this newsletter only.

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Adult Sector: Basic Education

Alain Mercier, of the Direction de la formation générale des adultes, talked about the work being done to develop the new curriculum in the adult general education sector, beginning with a framework for basic core education.

Mercier prefaced his update by reminding listeners that the work under way in the adult education sector is guided by two elements: the objectives put forth by the reform of general education in the youth sector, and the ministerial orientations with regard to rapid intervention among adults currently lacking basic education.

"We define basic education in two ways," Mercier said. "Education that leads to a Secondary School Diploma, or education that leads to a Diploma of Vocational Studies. It can take the form of basic core education, i.e. that which enables adults to complete Secondary III, therefore coinciding with the end of Secondary Cycle One in the youth sector, or diversified education, comparable to Secondary Cycle Two, which enables people to take different paths, leading to a Secondary School Diploma, to a Diploma of Vocational Studies, to prerequisites for college education, etc."

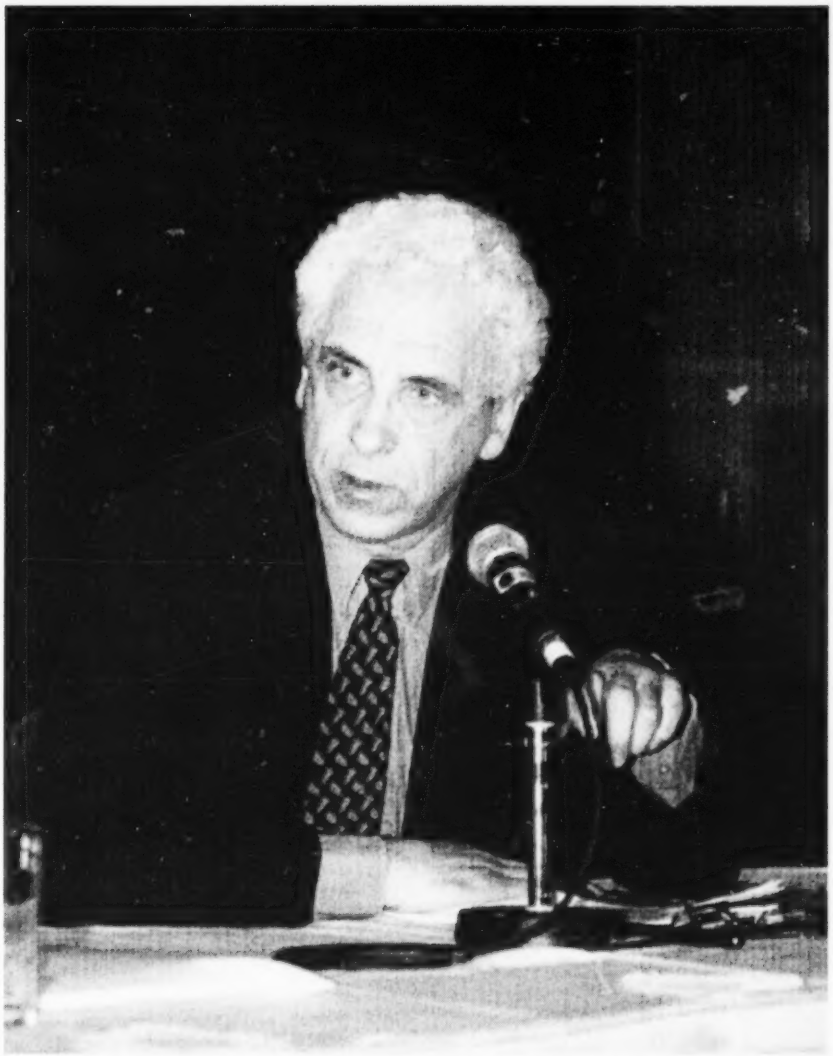
General Framework

In the fall of 2000, the DFGA produced the *General Framework for Basic Core Education*, which covers adult education from literacy training to the end of Secondary Cycle One. This document defines the concept of basic core education, specifies its aims and goals, outlines courses of action and, in line with the reform of general education in the youth sector, confirms certain curriculum development choices.

Also in the fall of 2000, officials visited each region in Québec to meet with teachers, pedagogical consultants, centre directors and school administrators to present the document and hear concerns, comments and suggestions.

The DFGA is now working on the development framework for the basic core curriculum, which will serve as the basis for drafting the new programs. Mercier outlined five elements that the document will encompass:

- competencies for basic core education: basic competencies, related to different aspects of personal and social life; general competencies; and technical competencies, which refer to the use of new technologies
- proposals for the organization of teaching basic core education
- evaluation of the competencies tied to basic core education. This will be based on the results of work currently being carried out with respect to the policy on the evaluation of learning in the youth sector
- all aspects of the recognition of the prior learning of adults (or of young people coming from the youth sector), including both academic and nonacademic learning. This information is used to identify what elements the adult requires to complete his or her education, to determine an educational path and to build a learning profile.
- certification of basic core education, seen by some as an end, and by others as a passport to diversified education



In addition to these two documents, several task groups have been formed to help clarify their content and translate these elements into reality.

"A committee has been set up to advise us on the major issues and challenges related to basic education, and to inform us of the expectations of the population, adults and organizations in terms of basic core education and diversified education, in terms of the content, evaluation methods, means for recognizing prior knowledge, and teaching/learning methods, including distance and on-line learning," said Mercier.

As well, a provincial committee composed mainly of teachers and education consultants has been given the mandate to comment on the framework, to supply new elements and to help set up continuing education activities.

Finally, in June, writing committees will be set up to begin drafting the basic core education programs. "This should enable us to keep the same calendar as the youth sector.

Mercier concluded by emphasizing three directives that are being taken into account: "The content that will be included in our education program must allow young people to make a harmonious transition to the adult sector, without being penalized," he said.

The calendar should also be the same as that set out for general education in the youth sector. Thirdly, "It is essential that the competencies retained enable adults to continue learning throughout their lives, and provide them with the tools to fully exercise their citizenship and to fulfil the various social roles they are expected to play in society today."

Educational Integration and Intercultural Education

Marguerite Rioux-Dolan presented the text of Marie-France Benes, director of the Direction des services aux communautés culturelles et École montréalaise.

The *Policy Statement on Educational Integration and Intercultural Education* was originally made public in the fall of 1998, along with a plan of action containing eleven concrete measures. The MEQ began implementing some of these measures last spring.

For example, in April 2000, in collaboration with the Commission scolaire de Montréal, a forum on the integration of immigrant students was organized. All school boards with a significant number of immigrant students newly arrived in Québec schools were invited to participate. Around the same period, there was a reflection

day on the issue of newly arrived students who are seriously behind in school.

The MEQ is currently providing technical and financial support to school boards as they develop or revise their internal policies and plans of action. It has called on these partners to choose flexible and varied integration models when it comes to welcoming classes and assistance in learning the French language. Emphasis is also placed on the commitment to developing projects that focus on helping immigrant students at risk, and to organizing activities that promote the French language and culture.

The MEQ has also begun a campaign to promote the teaching profession among young people belonging to visible minorities, in order to increase the pool of candidates from these minority groups. The ultimate goal is for the ethnic and cultural make-up of school personnel to reflect, and be representative of, the ethnic and cultural diversity of Québec society.

Supporting Montréal Schools

The Supporting Montréal Schools program is one of the priority lines of action of the education reform. Since 1997, $10 million has been allocated each year to disadvantaged schools on the island of Montréal. This year, the sum was shared by 124 elementary and secondary schools from five different school boards, catering to nearly 50,000 students.

Since its implementation, the program has allowed the target schools to present projects that foster learning suited to students' characteristics and needs and that ensure the educational success of the greatest number of students. These projects involve intervention with students at risk; development of reading competencies; implementation of the guidance-oriented school; promotion of vocational and technical education; cooperation between schools, families and communities; and professional development of school administrators and school teams.

To support the schools' projects, various tools and services have been designed or set up: teacher networks, cooperative development groups of school administrators and education professionals, a network of partner schools, a Web site, a directory of community organizations offering services to schools, videos, directories of cultural resources as well as several other support documents.

In March 2000, two major events took place. First, an international conference with specialists from Belgium, the United States, France, English Canada and Québec provided the opportunity to compare the mechanisms set up to help schools and students in disadvantaged communities and to exchange ideas on the particular problems and preoccupations in these communities. That same week, some 3 000 people from the education community and partner organizations participated in the Supporting Montréal Schools conference. This event allowed all players to see what was being done in other schools and how the community can contribute to fulfilling the schools' educational mission.

This year, particular emphasis has been placed on promising projects, as well as on research and evaluation. Promising projects address problems and needs widely recognized as crucial to the success of students who are at risk or from disadvantaged backgrounds, and could benefit all target schools as well as schools throughout the province. About 50 schools have presented projects of this type. Research and evaluation have played a significant role since the program's implementation, often leading to necessary adjustments. In fact, a two-year action plan was developed this year, aiming to evaluate the effects of the Supporting Montréal Schools program.

Students with Special Needs

"The priority issues in my department concern the 36 measures of the action plan accompanying the *Policy on Special Education*, adopted in January 2000," said Denise Gosselin, director of the Direction de l'adaptation scolaire. "These measures, to be carried out over five years, have to do with the individualized education plan, individualized paths for learning, taking into account students at risk when revising the curriculum, improving access to information and communication technologies, setting up regional support and expert services for students at risk, and much, much more."

Gosselin focused on three of these measures currently being carried out: evaluation of the *Policy on Special Education*, development of a reference framework to guide actions with students at risk, and the development of an MSSS-MEQ framework.

Evaluation of the Policy

Evaluation is an important part of the *Policy on Special Education*, "in order to have the information required to make sound decisions concerning students with learning disabilities or handicaps," explained Gosselin.

To this end, the action plan states that, "together with its partners, the Ministère de l'Éducation will develop a model for evaluating the application of the *Policy on Special Education*, specifying the focuses of evaluation, the measures to be taken and the main results expected."

The purpose of this evaluation is to verify whether the measures proposed by the policy help students with learning disabilities or handicaps to progress in terms of knowledge, social development and qualifications. It aims to propose indicators that make it possible to follow the situation's progression and to determine the elements that foster or hinder students' success.

Work to develop an evaluation protocol is currently under way, in collaboration with the Groupe de concertation en adaptation scolaire, composed of representatives from the school community, parents, associations, universities and the health and social services sector. The protocol will be submitted for consultation and then published during the 2001-2002 year.

Reference Framework

A framework to guide interventions with students at risk, especially those with learning disabilities, is currently being drafted. This framework will propose orientations and guidelines for prevention, reeducation and evaluation.

"This document is designed for teachers, speech therapists and other staff in student services, and administrators," said Gosselin.

It is being developed in collaboration with an advisory committee of professionals working in the field and with the regional support and expert teams that have been set up in each region. A first draft of the document will be validated by small groups representing the different regions, starting in May. The instrument is to be distributed in fall 2001.

MSSS-MEQ Framework

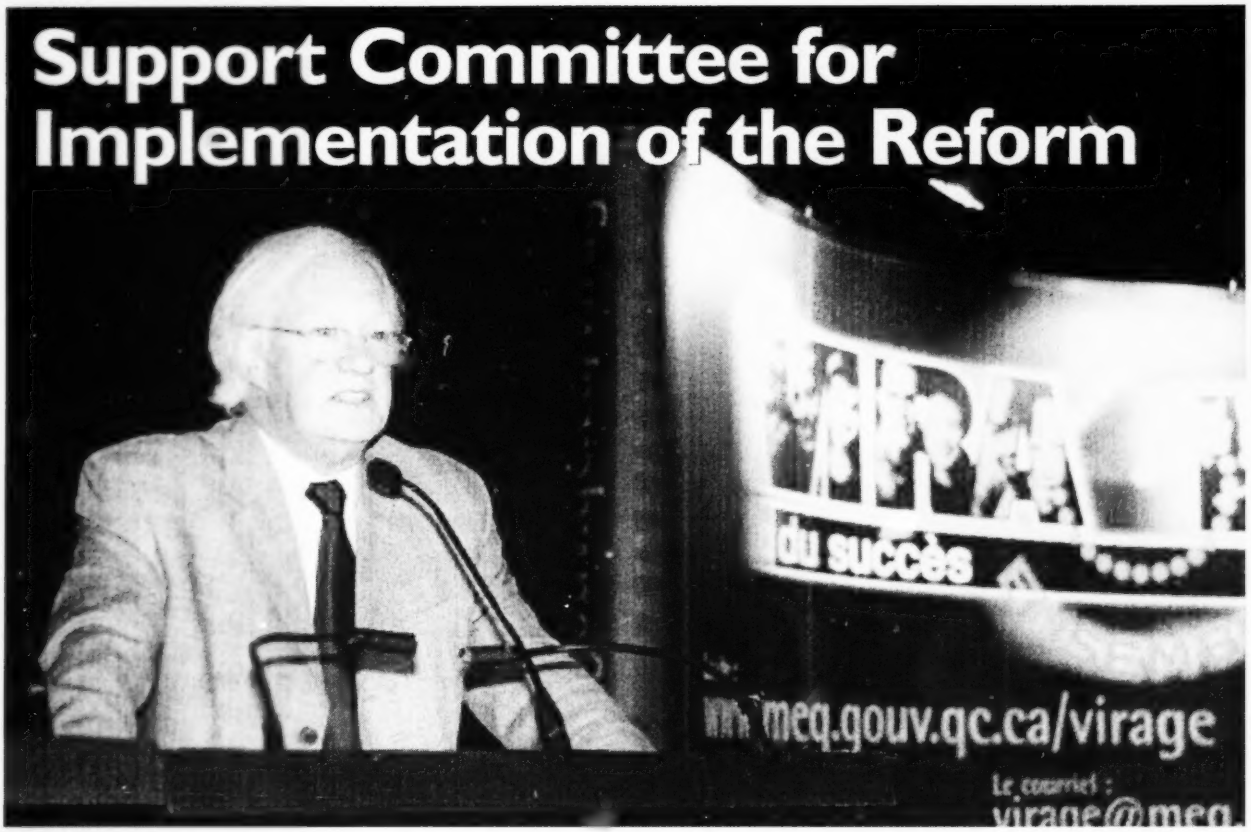
Last fall, the Ministère de l'Éducation and the Ministère de la Santé et des services sociaux set up a task force to produce a joint reference framework on the accessibility and complementarity of services.

"An overview of the situation, involving all local and regional players, will be carried out in the fall of 2001 in order to clearly identify the problems encountered and to pinpoint solutions based on successful experiences." Publication of the framework is planned for December 2002.

In the area of student services, two projects are being carried out: a reference framework for student services (see separate article), and an information document. The latter will offer guidelines to situate and consolidate the place of educational and professional information and orientation within educational services, with the aim of ensuring the success and qualification of all young people.

In addition, steps have been taken to give a provincial organization the mandate to support schools in the implementation of a guidance-oriented approach, and to develop a virtual reference centre for professional and educational information.

Support Committee for Implementation of the Reform



By Wendy Mill

Gilbert Dumont began by citing James Harrington, of Ernst and Young, to the effect that knowledge is cheap, but competencies are priceless. He explained that the support committee's mandate is to provide a critical perspective on all aspects of the implementation process, to involve various partners in the implementation of the reform and to propose strategies for action. In practice this means that the committee identifies activities to be undertaken, those requiring adjustments, and new activities to be developed.

The committee's 12 members, who come from schools, school boards, universities and the Ministère de l'Éducation, bring a considerable diversity of expertise to their work, which is guided by the conviction that the best way to ensure the credibility of the reform is to see that it is conducted in a spirit of ongoing partnership.

The support committee has six areas of activity:

Piloting the reform
- Objective: to ensure that actions are coordinated, convergent and complementary

Communication
- Objective: to create conditions for a collective, shared vision of the reform
- Comment: the aim is for people to have a greater sense of ownership of the approach underlying the reform

Training
- Objective: to provide school personnel with the training needed for understanding, integration and implementation of the reform

Evaluation of learning
- Objective: to ensure that the entire system uses evaluation policies and tools in keeping with the objectives of the reform

Pedagogical tools and materials
- Objective: to ensure that educators have easy access to the materials and tools necessary for the reform
- Comment: there are plenty of materials to facilitate the implementation process for the first two years

Resources for the implementation of the reform
- Objective: to create conditions conducive to the implementation of the reform

As stated above, the support committee favours a partnership approach. It has identified challenges and conditions that the various partners in the education community must meet in order to contribute to the success of the reform:

Ministère de l'Éducation
- Condition: forging a solid partnership

School boards
- Condition: decentralizing their pedagogical expertise

Schools:
- Condition: making the reform part of their educational project

School administrations
- Condition: managing and integrating diversity

Teachers
- Condition: professional accountability and teamwork

University faculty
- Condition: explaining the relationship between theory and practice

Students
- Condition: a partnership approach to learning

Unions
- Condition: the professionalization of the teaching profession

Parents
- Condition: collective action in the context of the reform
- Comment: some school boards have established "schools for parents," where parents learn about competencies and the other elements of the education reform

In closing, Dumont observed that the support committee is confident that the reform itself provides the solution to any problems that may arise in the course of its implementation. In this spirit, he recalled that the learner-based approach of the reform applies not only to students, but to all those involved in implementing the reform.

Spiritual Care and Guidance Community Involvement Service

Christine Cadrin-Pelletier, secretary of the Secrétariat aux affaires religieuses, provided a brief overview of the new spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service to be set up in elementary and secondary schools.

By Eve Krakow

A ministerial framework for the service, based on the Québec government's guidelines on the place of religion in schools and legislative changes to the *Education Act*, is currently undergoing consultation.

"The spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service is designed to meet the needs and aspirations of young people," said Cadrin-Pelletier. "Young people want to have adults around them who are able to support and guide them in building their personal identities and integrating into society."

The service also satisfies the expectations of parents and society. Parents want their children to become independent and happy adults, while society hopes that they become effective and involved citizens. Setting up a spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service can be an ideal way for schools to contribute to young people's overall development "by giving students the opportunity to integrate things they have learned into various activities that they themselves choose."

Non-Confessional

A key element is that the new service is non-confessional, to be made available to all students regardless of their religious background or beliefs. "Public schools do not exist to carry out the mission of the Churches or religious groups, but to recognize students' spiritual dimension and promote their spiritual growth," said Cadrin-Pelletier.

"The schools providing this service should be public (for all students in their territory), inclusive (catering to all students regardless of their differences) and democratic (promoting democratic values and the importance of human rights and freedoms). These schools should be open to knowledge, culture, the local community and the world in all its diversity."

The operational mode of the service may be compared to a laboratory—a place devoted to research and experimentation, where meaning and a sense of solidarity are developed. "The students are researchers; they ask questions, observe, formulate hypotheses for action, experiment, speak out, use their critical judgment, gain awareness and understanding, and develop their creativity—always based in concrete action."

The service is firmly anchored in the reality of the school. It is linked to the school's mission of socialization and to the areas of lifelong learning, in particular those of world-view and citizenship and community life. As well, "because the service is designed as an integral part of the educational services and school life, it is natural that the service animator have a say in developing and implementing the educational project," said Cadrin-Pelletier. Finally, service animators must work with the other members of the school team, parents and outside partners. "Their role is not only to exchange information on what the students are doing, but also to share their expertise with the community and participate in common projects."

Two Inseparable Aspects

The spiritual aspect and the community involvement aspect are intrinsically linked, said Cadrin-Pelletier. Spiritual development refers to the process one undertakes to approach the major questions in life. "It is a process that gradually helps us shape a vision of existence, which may be based in either philosophical or religious beliefs. The service aims to help students become aware of the questions they are asking themselves and the process in which they are engaged, whether consciously or not. To help them find answers. As you and I well know, this is a lifelong process."

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At the same time, the community involvement aspect "fosters the development of a social conscience, an openness to others, in order to build a more harmonious and more just society, a society that shows solidarity, and a recognition of human dignity and our common responsibilities towards the future of humanity and the universe."

Pedagogical Considerations

Obviously, Cadrin-Pelletier noted, such a service would be adapted to the age and abilities of the students. "You can't do the same kind of activities with elementary-school children and secondary students, but spiritual development and the sense of community involvement can and must be awakened early on if we are to achieve anything."

The animator's role is basically one of providing guidance to students, by establishing conditions and offering activities conducive to their research and experimentation. It is essential that the animator constantly show respect for the students, taking account of the range of knowledge and experience they already possess, and recognizing their right to freedom of conscience and religion.

How does the animator perform this role? The approach proposed is centred on action, and is summed up in three phases: to act, to review and to renew. "Students begin with a concrete action; they go back over what they have experienced; and then they pursue their action by new means, reinvesting what they have gained from reflecting on the experience."

This process is carried out through various activities. Examples of activities related to spiritual life are: exercises on self-esteem; a week devoted to beliefs; interiorization using allegories or short stories; reflection based on questions related to ethics, science or current affairs; and experiments based on the exploration of nature, the arts, rituals or symbols.

Activities related to community involvement might include leadership training camps, social justice committees, or committees for introducing others to democratic life or responsible citizenship; activities designed to promote awareness of international solidarity, basic human rights and the fight against poverty; and meetings with prisoners, the homeless and the elderly.

Qualifications Required

"This role requires solid training," Cadrin-Pelletier stressed. "We advocate that animators performing this service hold an undergraduate university diploma that includes training in the areas of spiritual life, social life, psycho-pedagogy and practice. Discussions on this issue are currently under way between management and union representatives, as well as with the universities."

Animators should also be open-minded (particularly in terms of culture and religion), have a positive view of spiritual life and community involvement, and have critical thinking skills, so as to be able to display objectivity and discernment when working with students.

Staffing and the exact organization of the service will depend on various factors such as the number of students to be served, the extent of the student group's cultural and religious diversity, the number of schools and the size of the territory to be covered, and the availability of material and financial resources.

"There is still much administrative work to be done," said Cadrin-Pelletier. "We will have to provide a lot of information so that everyone understands the nature and objectives of this new service." The *Plan de classification du personnel* will need to be modified, and teacher training and development will have to be organized with the school boards and universities. "The Ministère has already committed to investing money to facilitate professional development in this area in 2001-2002."

The new service will be financed by the Ministère, although the exact means remain to be clarified. It is to be set up in secondary schools in September 2001 and elementary schools in 2002.

"The 2001-2002 year in secondary schools should be seen as a year of implementation and adjustment," said Cadrin-Pelletier. "At the end of this first year, we'll be able to improve the document in light of experiences and expertise gained in the field, and ensure that the service's underlying vision is properly reflected in the reference framework for student services."

Work continues on the secondary school program

By Claudine St-Germain

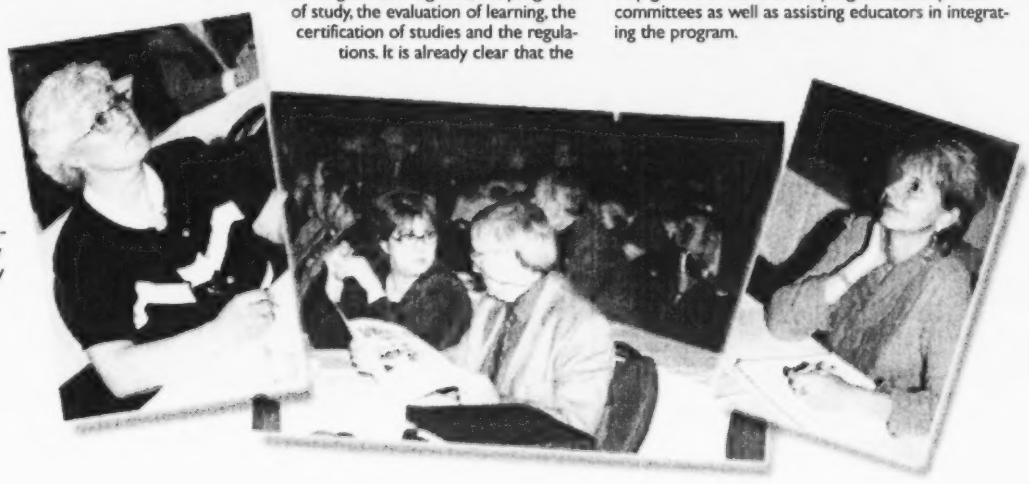
Work is continuing on the development of the secondary school program, which is to be implemented as of 2003. The program development committees, whose mandate is to prepare the ground for the larger committees by doing research, reading and other work, have been on the job since February.

A test model of the program will be published in fall 2001, and a call will go out to the schools in order to identify those interested in taking part in the testing as pilot schools (in 2002-2003). As was the case for the elementary education program, the participating schools will be selected to represent the reality of secondary education in Québec as closely as possible.

A draft version of the Secondary Cycle One program should be available in June 2002. Measures for implementing the three-year cycle will be drafted by winter 2002; committees are currently studying this question.

As was the case for the elementary education program, work is being carried out simultaneously on the Program of Programs, the programs of study, the evaluation of learning, the certification of studies and the regulations. It is already clear that the structure of the Cycle One program will be different from that of Cycle Two, because Secondary III, the end of Cycle One, marks the end of common-core basic education.

An orientation document on the learning expectations for each cycle will be produced and distributed in the school system in fall 2001. This document will help guide the work of the program development committees as well as assisting educators in integrating the program.



2000-2001 in Retrospect; Outlook for 2001-2002

By Wendy Mill

On the afternoon of April 25, Robert Bisaillon summed up his perception of the present situation of the education reform and the perspectives for the future after the Québec Education Program's first year in the elementary schools. Many of his comments were based on feedback from participants in workshops.

Descriptive Scales

Beginning with evaluation, and particularly the issue of descriptive scales, which had been one of the focuses of the meeting, he said the message he was getting was "not now, not right away, not without professional development, not without integrating the scales into our general process of appropriating the reform." He agreed it was crucial for teachers and others to understand the purpose of the descriptive scales in order to avoid replacing the QEP by descriptive scales or "teaching for testing." In short, we must not seek to implement descriptive scales prematurely. We have learned something from the field day the newspapers had with report cards that were simply a replica of the program. Evaluation has to be presented in the context of a program, and descriptive scales should be used within a learning situation.

Grade Repetition

Turning next to the subject of grade repetition, Bisaillon noted that this is still an open question, and that the debate is marked by troubling emotional overtones. The only thing we know for sure is that there is less repetition in multi-level classrooms: it seems that when the composition of the class is a given, there is less anxiety about grade repetition. "Whenever students repeat a grade," he observed, "people say the school has failed them, but I say that every time grade repetition is used as a threat, the school and the teaching profession are failing to do their job."

He urged educators to abandon the "narrow, guillotine-type mentality" in favour of an emphasis on "facilitating factors:" support by and for parents; differentiated teaching (which could lead to a redefinition of grades); competency-based programs; respecting each child's rhythm; teachers' co-responsibility for decisions concerning children; identification of problems in kindergarten for four-year-olds; better preparation of teachers to help at-risk children; lower student-teacher ratios; the use of portfolios, descriptive scales and "traces" for assessment; giving children who encounter difficulties credit for the progress they have achieved; making greater use of individualized education plans; establishing indicators for monitoring children beyond the year they repeat and developing clearer Ministry definitions of at-risk and exceptional students.

Notwithstanding the large number of facilitating factors, Bisaillon acknowledged that the alternatives to grade repetition, and more generally to evaluation and its consequences—"the devil we know"—are not really clear yet. However, the general direction in which we should move is clear: piecemeal measures and "business as usual" are ineffective; only the intensive intervention model holds real promise.

The Difference a Year Makes

"A year ago," Bisaillon observed, "you wanted to make sure there would be enough money set aside for instructional materials and textbooks; now, you worry the whole budget might be spent on textbooks, leaving nothing for professional training." To him, this is a clear sign of the salutary impact of teamwork in the implementation of the QEP. People have discovered that they take pleasure in working together—they are less isolated, there is real solidarity. They have had time to exchange views, and in doing so, have developed a real focus on pedagogy. A year of teamwork has effected "an irreversible change in their perception of their own practice—a professionalization of the teaching profession."

The Road Ahead

There is still a serious need for training. One team called for a pedagogical equivalent of the FTAA: a free-exchange zone between school boards and schools, among school boards, and among schools. Someone suggested a mobile professional development team. "The Ministère is well aware that the need for training has not been fully met, and that if we don't guarantee personnel adequate training, we will have serious difficulties," said Bisaillon. Later,

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however, he took up this theme from a different perspective, affirming that, as far as professional development is concerned, "the reform will not be purely "ministerial," or vertical: teachers will receive training, but there also has to be "horizontal" movement, produced by their own appropriation of the reform." Similarly, he argued that "we must create a 'culture of regulation' not only with respect to children's learning, but also to our own."

He showed concern with regard to the evolution of attitudes towards the reform, both those of the general public and the press, and those of the educational community. He reminded his audience that "We must combat that old Jansenist residue in our thinking: that notion that 'if it doesn't hurt, it can't be doing any good,' but added that, "We also have to make sure the children really are learning, and demonstrate that this is the case. It isn't just because they do projects or because there are cross-curricular competencies, or even because they are having fun that they are learning."

Regarding the upcoming revised version of the QEP, he remarked that "there seems to be agreement with the changes that are being made, such as greater simplicity." But, just as "nobody tells a doctor how to establish a diagnostic," ultimately it is up to the schools to regulate their use of the new curriculum according to their needs. He hoped that they would be well prepared for the new version and able to defend the progress it represents, and, with respect to evaluation and report cards, that existing practices would "not be revolutionized, but rather regulated." Observing that for some school boards, the reform is apparently not a central concern, as they have cut their budgets for educational services, he worried that this might undermine support and appear to vindicate the unions' perspective, and urged people to "keep their priorities clear."

In conclusion, he once again intertwined the themes of public criticism and taking a proactive role: "The efforts you have made and the conviction you bring to the reform," he said, "are the most effective antidote to demoralization caused by external criticism."

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